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Western Dance Aesthetics

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achieved, a feeling of satisfaction, an aesthetic miniclimax, is experienced; then the eye and mind move on to explore the next design module. The dance performance is no less a series of progressions toward points of aesthetic tension and resolution. A particularly skillful "attack" may mark the end of a unit in a combat dance. Solo and chain dances are composed of crescendos of activity and excitement followed by interruptions and new beginnings. Even the religious dances emphasize a succession of emotional and physical climaxes. Because performances usually present a series of music and dance numbers, the artistic event is a multilevel organization of separate entities.

Movements. Just as the patterns of Islamic visual art are characterized by a proliferation of complex details, the dances of Islamic peoples emphasize small and intricate movements. Performers operate in a fairly confined area, displaying shivering, shaking, jerking, or rolling movements rather than wide leaps and open leg movements. In some parts of the Muslim world, whole dances are performed in a sitting or kneeling position. The viewer's appreciation can result only from a careful following of the intricacies of interplay between accompaniment and movement.

Each of the prominent Islamic dance genres—combat dances, solo improvisations, chain dances, and the religious dances of the mystical (Sufi) brotherhoods—has its special movements and flavor. In addition, each part of the Muslim world evidences certain regional preferences for particular movements, accompaniment practices, and costuming. Yet, underlying these elements of variance, the four core characteristics prevail, testifying to a basic artistic unity in the dances of the Muslim peoples.

[*See also* Islam and Dance.]

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LOIS LAMYA' AL-FARUQI

Western Dance Aesthetics

Western philosophers since the time of Plato have discussed the nature of dance, its varieties and purposes, its connections with music, drama, and poetry, and its distinctive features as a form of creative achievement. Interest in dance aesthetics as an independent subject is a relatively new phenomenon, however. Consequently, few major treatises are devoted entirely to it. The paucity of sources is attributable in part to the fact that for centuries dance was frequently integrated so thoroughly with music and/or drama that it did not command separate treatment in philosophical discussions of the arts.

Some periods in Western culture, particularly those influenced by medieval or puritanical attitudes in which dancing was perceived as sinful, were not sympathetic to discussing dance as an art form because dancing, except for religious purposes, was considered a diversion from the spiritual purposes of life. In the seventeenth century, however, writers began to show an awareness of the importance of dance, particularly in regard to its affinities with and differences from poetry, music, and painting. Twentieth-century philosophers have engaged in the aesthetic problems unique to dance.

Antiquity. The records of Western philosophical writings on the dance as a form of art begin with the ancient Greeks. Their commentaries on the nature and functions of dance are frequently commingled with discussions of music and drama and often appear in treatises on education, moral conduct, and cultural life in general. Although the remarks found in these writings often pertain to dancing as a means of education or of socialization, the authors also consider it to be a mode of artistic performance.

Plato's *Republic* examines the theory that all art is "imitation," either of human passions and actions or of things and events as they appear to the senses. In the *Laws,* Plato considers dance under two separate aspects: its relation to education and virtue, and its relation to the general theory of imitation. For the Greeks of his time, dance was important both in training the body through gymnastics and as a principal means of cultivating the soul. Plato is careful to distinguish between dancing as an educational activity in which every well-educated citizen is expected to participate and dancing as performance in the theatrical spectacles that mark the annual festivals. According to Plato, an amateur who undertakes dance as a form of physical and cultural education would not enter into it to the same degree as one totally committed to the art. The aim of the citizen is to develop his own body and mind by dancing. In contrast, the performer's aim is to create mimetic images that will provide edifying models of virtuous living for the community. A dance edifies when it correctly imitates persons and actions that exemplify such properties

as moral goodness and artistic beauty. Pleasure is thus subordinated to moral and artistic worth as a measure of value.

Aristotle refers only briefly to dance in his major aesthetics treatise, the *Poetics*, but provides a fuller treatment in the *Politics*, where he questions the end the arts serve and the benefits derived from participating in an art form. The end of all mimetic arts, including dancing, is imitation of human characters, actions, and experiences. The distinctive end of dance is achieved by means of "rhythm without harmony" (*Poetics*, chapter 1). It is natural for human beings to enjoy both the act of dancing and the process of learning that takes place on viewing imitative actions in an artistic performance. The broader educational ends of such activities are spelled out more fully in book 8 of the *Politics*, where dance is discussed under the term *mousikē*. There, the end of dancing is the development of intellectual culture and, ultimately, of moral character. Aristotle's influence extends into the twentieth century. Writers in each generation have modified his basic concept of imitation to suit their own purposes.

In the Hellenistic period, Plutarch, Lucian, and Athenaeus, while continuing in the tradition of Aristotle, contributed their own additions to or modifications of a theory of dance aesthetics. Plutarch further defines the elements though which imitation can take place. Dancing, he says, consists of three elements: moments, positions, and pointing. The moments constitute phrases that express some emotion, action, or potentiality. Poses are the names of the representational positions, as when the dancers compose their bodies to represent a being such as Apollo or Pan. Pointing functions rather like a proper name—literally to indicate or denote through the dance what is being represented (*Moralia: Table Talk*, book 9). Plutarch's analogies between dance, painting, and poetry invite analysis from the point of view of modern semiotic and linguistic theories of artistic symbols.

Lucian's dialogue *The Dance* underscores the legitimacy of dance as an imitative art with historical traditions comparable to those of music, rhetoric, and philosophy. As with these arts, dance reveals what is in the mind, whether by depicting characters, by imitating rhythmic patterns, or by expression through bodily movements and gestures.

Lucian recognizes the intellectual character of dance as well as its technical requirements and benefits. He emphasizes that a dancer must be able to express his or her ideas and sentiments through the intelligibility of movements and postures. This knowledge is the product of a thoroughly prepared mind that is aware of the important ideas and sentiments of past and present cultures. The dancer also knows how to generate rhythmical and graceful imitations through bodily movements and gestures so as to give the viewer both pleasure and understanding.

In book 14 of *The Deipnosophists* Athenaeus argues that composers and performers of dances in ancient times were as much concerned with the qualities of the movement itself as with the imitative aspects of dancing. The poets, who frequently invented dances for stage performances, composed them to suit the form of their poetry and music. Athenaeus observes that in ancient dances movements of the arms were shaped with great care and that the ancients sought movements that were beautiful as well as becoming to decent people. He shares their view that noble and beautiful dances are the product of beautiful souls and are likely to enhance the souls of both performers and spectators.

Athenaeus classifies more than sixty types of dances. He distinguishes three kinds suitable for the state, each with its own particular aesthetic properties of style and expression: tragic, comic, and satyric. Tragic dance is exemplified by the "naked boy dance," which uses hand gestures like those of wrestlers and is characterized by gravity and solemnity. Comic dance is associated with *hyporchēma*, a dance for men and women in which the chorus sings as it performs dances with lively, fun-filled moments. Satyric dance, exemplified by the war dance, emphasizes rigor and speed but lacks depth of feeling. [*See* Greece, *article on* Dance in Ancient Greece.]

Middle Ages. The dominant medieval aesthetic theories governing dance were drawn from three principal sources—the Bible, the works of ancient and contemporary philosophers, and the writings of the Greek and Latin church fathers—as well as from actual practice. In the absence of any substantial primary treatises, what is known of the aesthetic principles governing dance as an art is based on the general principles applied to the arts and occasional textual references to dancing.

In the Bible, dancing is generally perceived in a favorable light when it is an expression of praise and a celebration of Yahweh, or God. One account describes Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, leading a dance of celebration (*Exodus* 15.20), and David is mentioned on several occasions as dancing in praise of Yahweh (*1 Chronicles* 15.29; *2 Samuel* 6.14–16). Dancing in the Bible is also mentioned in conjunction with, although not necessarily as the cause of, certain ominous episodes: the golden calf (*Exodus* 32.19), which signified idolatry; the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter (*Judges* 11.34), and Salome's dancing before Herod (*Matthew* 14.6; *Mark* 6.22). Similarly, writers in the Middle Ages—Augustine and other church fathers who otherwise perceived dancing as a violation of virtue—uniformly sanctioned dance that centered on the praise of God. [*See* Bible, Dance in the.]

In book 6 of *On Music*, Augustine considers form and beauty of movement with reference to harmony and proportion. He relates these notions to bodily rhythms, observing that they also influence the rhythms of the soul.

Rhythms emanating from God, impressed on the body through the actions of the soul, are preferable to those originating in the actions and passions of the body.

The sixth-century writer Dionysius the Areopagite transmitted to the Middle Ages the ideas and images of Plotinus concerning the movements of the heavenly and earthly hierarchies. Dionysius's analysis of straight lines and of circular and spiral movements of celestial inhabitants describes the three principal forms of dance—circular, processional, and whirling—mentioned in medieval sources.

For the church fathers, aesthetic considerations such as form, expression, and style were subordinated to religious and moral issues. Many recognized that dancing, modeled on biblical acts of praise and thanksgiving in the forms ascribed to celestial figures by Platens and his followers, could be, as Ambrose observed, "an ally of faith and an honoring of grace."

During the mid- to late Middle Ages, many philosophers came to recognize that a completely satisfactory aesthetic experience requires what Hugh of Saint-Victor (early twelfth century) called a union of the "light of the higher senses and the pleasure of physical gratification." According to Hugh, this union is best achieved in works that incorporate music, poetry, dancing, and the visual arts through the harmonization of sounds, smells, lights, colors, movements, and expressive gestures, with their deeper symbolic meanings.

In the late Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas considered dance to be an art of "pure play," one directed primarily toward pleasure. He adopted a more liberal view of the arts than did Augustine. Aquinas found dance acceptable provided it did not directly endanger morality or upset the equilibrium of life as a whole; pleasures inspired by beautiful artistic images may in fact be necessary to spiritual well-being. Aquinas's liberal views are grounded in his philosophical principles. Following Aristotle, he argues that an artist's primary aim is to actualize his image or idea in matter. The body in dance thus becomes a necessary vehicle for realizing the images of the soul. Aquinas recognizes the primacy of properties of movement in a dance work; moral and religious intentions are secondary to essential artistic considerations. He recognizes that the body is outside the soul and therefore incapable of corrupting it. These concepts allow Aquinas to accept some dances that directly produce bodily pleasure because they do not threaten to corrupt the soul.

During the Middle Ages, dance—whether within the church, in a theatrical setting (such as a mystery play), or in other independent settings intended for entertainment—was judged according to religious and moral criteria as well as aesthetic merit. The church fathers' condemnations were directed at the debasement of dance rather than at dance itself. [*See* Christianity and Dance, *article on* Medieval Views.]

Renaissance. During the Renaissance, dance took on new refinements and began to occupy an increasingly prominent place in the cultural life of the courts. Humanistic notions gradually assumed a prominent place among the pluralistic views of philosophers and arts theorists, but there was no abrupt shift away from the medieval aesthetic principles governing dance.

The major sources of dance aesthetics for the period are the works of the Renaissance philosophers Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Marsilio Ficino, and Baldassare Castiglione. Building on Aristotle, Pico claimed that imagination has its own inventive function. It conceives and fashions particular images with sensory properties, whereas the intellect functions at the level of abstraction. Imagination, for instance, would produce the artistic forms of movement created by the dance composer. Aware that imagination could be directed to evil as well as good, Pico added that the wise practitioner should "direct the eye of the mind to God" (Pico, 1930).

Ficino's Platonic ideas on beauty and the arts serve as a source of the theory underlying much of the artistic activity of the Renaissance. In Ficino's terms, a dance might exemplify human striving for beauty. "The beauty of the body lies," he wrote to Giovanni Cavalcanti, "not in the shadow of matter, but in the light and grace of form; not in dark mass, but in clear proportion; not in sluggish and senseless weight, but in harmonious number and measure" (Ficino, 1975–1988). For Ficino, the visible marks of beauty expressed in artistic forms are the signs of invisible beauties characteristic of the soul and ultimately of divine beauty itself.

Of all Renaissance theories, Castiglione's has the most direct relationship to dance. In *The Book of the Courtier,* he bases his advice on an aesthetic model that might also have guided dance composers of the period. The courtier's art should arrange the elements of life so that they meet three essential requirements: to appear natural, to satisfy the rules of social decorum, and to reveal a fundamental beauty.

Grace, sprezzatura, and *beauty* are the principal terms of Castiglione's aesthetic. Grace is the harmonious elegance and refinement characteristic of true art, which does not appear to be art. It is the result of taking great care to conceal both the effort and the conformity to rules necessary for its achievement. Ease and spontaneity in accomplishing difficult acts, together with lack of affectation and an observable reserve of energy, are the marks of a graceful action. *Sprezzatura* is the "slightly superior disdain," or studied nonchalance, that accompanies a graceful action, giving the impression that it has been accomplished almost without thought or attention. Both assume a certain freedom, an independence

gained not from rebelling against rules but by mastering them.

The Renaissance also witnessed the appearance of the important dance manuals of Domenico da Piacenza, Fabritio Caroso, and Thoinot Arbeau. Although intended to give instructions for performing certain dances, these manuals also reflected contemporary theories of imagination, beauty, and grace. Not all Renaissance scholars saw dance in favorable terms, however. Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, for example, attempted to discredit ancient, medieval, and contemporary supporters of dance by attributing its popularity to the work of the devil, preferring instead to advance the arts of magic and the occult.

Seventeenth Century. A preoccupation with the developing ideas of science and mathematics and their implications for philosophical issues drew the attention of the major seventeenth-century philosophers away from questions of aesthetics. A notable exception was Thomas Hobbes, who recognized the importance of the fine arts. Nevertheless, Hobbes attempted to "despiritualize" them by reducing matters of the soul and the passions to mechanical terms. Despite their disparaging references to the fine arts, the seventeenth-century rationalists exerted a profound influence on writers of aesthetics, who now urged that the arts should be developed by the application of rational methods analogous to the principles of mathematics and logic.

A principal spokesman for dance in this era was the Jesuit philosopher and dancing master Claude-François Ménéstrier, whose *Des ballets anciens et modernes selon les règles du théâtre* (1682) is a paradigm of neoclassical aesthetics. Ménéstrier sets forth rules for composing dances, basing his theories on classical sources and on firsthand knowledge of approximately two hundred ballets of his own time. He begins his definition of ballets with Aristotle's succinct statement in the *Poetics* that representational dances express actions, characters, and passions by means of harmonious rhythms and the controlled movements of gestures, actions, and patterns. Ménéstrier expands on and illustrates this definition, setting forth in considerable detail the qualitative or formal requirements and the quantitative or necessary components of a ballet, including the ways in which it differs from dance in general or from a poem or painting. Because ballet uses human movement and has greater flexibility of subject matter, Ménéstrier throughout his treatise attributes to it a greater range of representational skills than is found in poetry or painting.

A ballet must have unity of design, for example, but it does not require unity of action or of time and place. Its essential qualitative parts are invention, or the choice of a subject and its development in the ballet composer's imagination; character; movements; harmony; and decoration. Throughout his discussion, Ménéstrier emphasizes the ballet composer's inspiration and skill in shaping these parts, but he is careful to say that native wit or inspiration does not eliminate the need for the rules. Like the rationalist philosophers of the day, he assumes that the rules for making ballets are not arbitrary; they have their roots in the classical models and in a reasoned interpretation and use of nature.

Eighteenth Century. Major developments in philosophical aesthetics and proliferations of treatises on dance provided the basis for dance aesthetics in the eighteenth century. The British aesthetician David Hume and his English colleagues stressed the importance of aesthetic feeling and inner sense, with which they intended to supplant the neoclassical ideal of rules as the criteria for judgments of aesthetic taste. Hume's "inner sense" corresponds to the "natural" values of order, elegance, and harmony in the forms of art; however, inner sense would not necessarily dictate aesthetic choices differing from those based on rules.

The German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten's desire to establish a special domain for the arts led him to separate them from the domain of rationalist thinking. He advanced the idea that the fine arts are unique and nonintellectual in form and content. In this domain, sensuous richness and clarity of form are as important to the fine arts as logical truth and certainty of observation are to philosophy and science.

Among the eighteenth-century philosophers who wrote about dance are Abbé Dubos (Jean-Baptiste Du Bos), Charles Batteux, Denis Diderot, and Adam Smith. These authors agree in general that dance, along with music and poetry, has as its principal end to create pleasure through imitation. They also hold in common the corollary that dance expresses sentiments and feelings along the lines that Hume suggested. Certain questions important to the future of dance aesthetics emerge in the writings of this period—for instance, over such issues as whether imitation is an essential feature of dance, the relative importance of formal concerns versus expressive and narrative components, and the choice of subjects. Batteux and Diderot argue that dance is essentially an imitative or representational art form. Dubos, while recognizing the role of imitation, argues that motion is the principal artistic means of creating pleasure in a dance. Smith (1795), who defines dancing in a formalist manner as "a succession of a certain sort of steps, gestures, and motions, regulated according to time or measure" and formed into a system, suggests that imitation is not necessarily required of dance. As to appropriate subjects for dances, Diderot (1970) advises composers of dances to draw their subjects from domestic and bourgeois life, and, as Batteux (1746) suggests, to present them with "natural unaffected move-

ments." On the other hand, Smith anticipates the modernist need to accommodate dances with no subject other than movement itself.

Paralleling the theories of the eighteenth-century philosophers were writings of choreographers such as John Weaver and Jean-Georges Noverre. For Weaver, the excellence of dance was found in its imitative powers, to explain things conceived in the mind by means of bodily gestures and motions, thus "plainly and intelligibly" representing actions, manners, and passions so that the audience could perfectly understand the performer "by these his Motions, tho' he say not a Word." However, Weaver claims, dance may be beautiful as well as excellent. For Weaver, it achieves beauty when it is "consonant to the Rules of harmonical Proportion and adorn'd with the Beauty of a natural and cultivated Gracefulness" (Weaver, 1960, p. 40). Still, these beautiful motions must be appropriate to the actions and passions that are imitated.

Noverre's discussions parallel those of the philosophers who believed that successful theatrical representations must touch the heart, move the soul, and influence the imagination. His statement that "a well-composed ballet is a living picture of the passions, manners, ceremonies, and customs, of all nations" (Noverre, 1930) underscores the need for expression and universal appeal. He agrees with Diderot that technical facility in dancing, even when it results in grace and nobility of movements, is insufficient without imitation. [*See* Christianity and Dance, *article on* Modern Views.]

Nineteenth Century. Romanticism emerged as a literary-philosophical movement in Germany as early as the mid-eighteenth century with the aesthetics of *Sturm und Drang*. It became a major force in the arts of the nineteenth century throughout Europe and America, stressing originality of genius over elegance and intensity of feeling over conformity to neoclassical rules. As a complex cultural phenomenon, romanticism embraces many different elements—sublime nature; scientific investigation of the past; myth and magic; a demand for free exercise of imagination; a merging of sense, feeling, and intellect; and the elevation of the subjective and spiritual elements of experience. Contrary to the views of the Enlightenment rationalists, the Romantic thinkers and artists considered the fine arts a primary means of ascertaining the true nature of reality. The fine arts were thus, in some instances, elevated above philosophy itself.

Although G. W. F. Hegel failed to include dance in his pantheon of the major fine arts, his brief remarks on dance, together with his views on sculpture and theater, suggest a philosophical approach to the art. In contrast to Théophile Gautier, Hegel offers a metaphysical view wherein dance is judged according to its ability to express mind or spirit.

To Gautier (1947), "dancing consists of nothing more than the art of displaying beautiful shapes in graceful positions and the development from them of lines agreeable to the eye." To him, the Romantic ballet encompassed a formalist aesthetic that depended on a strong commitment to technique; it was a form of dance more suited to expression of the passions than to dealing with metaphysical themes. Still, ideas of striving toward unattainable ideals of beauty and pleasure cannot be entirely divorced from their metaphysical grounding in the philosophies of German romanticism. Although Romantic ballet does not necessarily encompass all the philosopher-aestheticians' ideas, ballet and the literary-philosophical movement share certain points: the predominance of spiritual and emotional elements over rationalist principles; the blending of dreams and reality; the mixing of supernatural and magical elements with natural experiences; and the use of imagination to forge a new vision of the world with new artistic and scientific means of exploring it.

Toward the end of the Romantic period, the symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé offered his philosophical expression of the Romantic ballet, calling it "the supreme theatrical form of poetry" (Mallarmé, 1956). For Mallarmé, the ballet is a symbolic form that enables a ballerina, who stands at the edge of fantasy and reality, to be the unconscious revealer of truths inexpressible in any other medium. It differs from its sister art of mime through its use of steps, rather than gesture, as the foundation of its structure. According to Mallarmé, mime characters are the medium for depicting "reality," but dance steps express the fantasy aspects of a theme.

Both Gautier and Mallarmé accept the doctrine of "art for art's sake" and the formalist tendencies that evolved from romanticism. This legacy and romanticism's emphasis on subjective feeling and intuition, leading to a proliferation of expression theories of art, established the two main foundations of twentieth-century aesthetics. Neither Friedrich Nietzsche's dichotomous tension between Dionysian and Apollonian forces nor the social demands of Marxist aesthetics have been able to offset these powerful tendencies of the modern era that began in the mid-nineteenth century.

Twentieth Century. The diversity of modern aesthetic views parallels the emergence of widely varied developments in dance itself. Early in the century, Akim Volynsky, Paul Valéry, André Levinson, Adrian Stokes, and Rayner Heppenstall were especially notable for their contributions to a formalist approach to ballet. Valéry focused attention on the dance itself, considering that the dancers' actions, consisting of steps and gestures arranged in a certain order, are to be admired principally for their inherent qualities of movement.

Levinson based a similar concept of pure dance on the principle of the "turned-out body," rather than on any imitation of human action or features. This principle, the foundation of classical ballet training, calls for "turning the limbs" of the dancer outward from the torso, its "center," to facilitate balance, sideways movement, extensions, and turns. Freed from its usual limitation to forward and backward motion, the body can then move with ease and grace in any direction. This greater flexibility in movement "frees" the dance from dependence on imitation and allows for the fuller development of interest in the movement itself. [*See the entry on Levinson.*] Volynsky further defines the elements—turnout, vertical line, and elevation—that are characteristic of ballet and its aesthetic means. Heppenstall interprets these formalist principles as symbols of order and perfection in a confused world.

Expression as an independent theory applied to dance and the other arts emerged at the turn of the twentieth century in the works of Eugène Véron, Leo Tolstoy, and others and underwent many variations, most prominently in the writings of such philosophers as Robin George Collingwood, Susanne K. Langer, Monroe Beardsley, Rudolf Arnheim, and Nelson Goodman. Common to these is the belief that a primary aim of dance is to communicate, present, or exhibit the expressive properties of the movement—the feelings, moods, and dynamic qualities and their symbolic features that are intended or perceived to be part of a dance.

Véron agrees with Valéry in rejecting imitation as the principal consideration in dance aesthetics. Like Tolstoy and Collingwood, he believes that all art—including dance—consists primarily of the expression of emotion. Collingwood, Langer, Arnheim, and Goodman argue that expression in dance is a form of human symbolic behavior. According to Langer, the feeling in a work of art represents the artist's idea of the feeling; dance is virtual, not actual, gesture; and the feeling that governs the dance is imagined, not actual. Arnheim defines expression as an essential property of physical and mental processes. The expressive properties, including feeling and perceived bodily muscular tensions in a dance movement, are experienced through corresponding acts in the mind of the spectator.

Contemporary philosophers, including Beardsley, Goodman, and Joseph Margolis, have applied the methods of analytic philosophy to the meaning of "expression" in dance. Beardsley makes expressiveness a requisite property for a motion to be accepted as dance. Goodman (1968) understands expression as "metaphorical exemplification," a form of symbolism requiring that the symbol—a dance—assumes certain properties that it cannot literally possess. According to Goodman, his own theater piece *Hockey Seen, A Nightmare in Three Periods and Sudden Death* (1972) expresses various aspects of competition, conflict, violence, frustration, and the struggle between aggression and authority without the dancers being literally violent or frustrated. Goodman considers dance in relation to his theory of symbols and notational symbol systems as outlined in his book, *Languages of Art*. In contrast to Goodman, Margolis argues that a theory of the dance cannot be completely formulated without attention to the literal expressive features of bodily movement, which he believes are passed over in Goodman's conception.

Other recent philosophers who have contributed ideas on topics in dance aesthetics include Étienne Gilson, Mikel Dufrenne, Graham McFee, David Michael Levin, and, most notably, Francis Sparshott. Levin invokes modernist formalism, as exemplified in the choreography and performances of George Balanchine (for example *Agon* and *Violin Concerto*), to develop an aesthetic theory of dance. Formalist dance aesthetics suppresses representational and theatrical elements of dance in favor of the "pure" formal expressiveness of an abstract syntax of movement.

Sparshott applies analytic philosophy to the practices of dance in all cultures in an effort to lay the groundwork for future dance aesthetics. His two books, *Off the Ground: First Steps to a Philosophical Consideration of the Dance* (1988) and *A Measured Pace: Towards a Philosophical Understanding of the Arts of Dance* (1995), represent the most comprehensive efforts to date to examine the philosophical problems of dance. Sparshott focuses on dance as consisting of a broad range of dances including Western ballet, modern dance, and contemporary theater dance, as well as selective artistic and nonart dances of other cultures. While disavowing any general theory of dance, Sparshott suggests that inquiry might focus on how dance has meaning in the lives of humans as the perpetrators of culture in general. Two central concepts guide Sparshott's inquiry: "The concept of a practice" and "dance as a means of transformation of the person dancing." According to Sparshott, dance exists as a practice when persons knowingly engage in bodily movements with a recognizable form that can be identified by conventions such as cultural values expressed in rules, standards, or ideals (*A Measured Pace*, 301–305). For Sparshott, dance's capacity for transforming the person dancing by altering his/her being distinguishes dance from other arts and other forms of human activity.

Apart from philosophers, numerous writers from other fields have enriched contemporary dance aesthetics. Selma Jeanne Cohen has served as a catalyst in dance criticism, history, and aesthetics, stimulating philosophers and others to explore in greater depth questions concerning the identity of the dance work, expression, and style.

Critics such as George Beiswanger, Edwin Denby, and John Martin have also added to the discussion of dance aesthetics. Beiswanger's essays on dancemaking describe dances that "raise the eventful high above the threshold of perception" (Beiswanger, 1973). Denby's remarks uniquely combine theory and visual observations. His writings on dance exemplify the very essence of the dance experience as seen by him. Martin (1933) attempts to define an aesthetics of "the new modern dance." He characterizes the primary purpose of modern dance as a desire to externalize personal experience "in the direction of individualism and away from standardization." His approach is based on negating the classical and the Romantic approaches to dance, with their adherence to a set vocabulary of movements and attitudes favoring abstract over natural bodily movements.

An additional source is the writings of choreographers. Michel Fokine called for a variety of choreographic approaches instead of reliance on a single method of fixed movements and poses. He recommended movements based on naturalistic expression combined with stylistic consistency reflecting national character and period style. George Balanchine's writings state with pristine clarity the essence of the art of choreographing movement. To him, ballet was about the movement of bodies in time and does not represent anything beyond itself. He liked to compare dance to a flower: a beautiful thing that does not need to tell a story.

The writings of such modern dance pioneers as Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, Mary Wigman, Martha Graham, and Doris Humphrey are also useful for the story of dance aesthetics. Duncan's rejection of ballet and her endorsement of natural bodily movements marked the beginning of a plurality of approaches to Western dance. Although they shared a desire to create expressive forms, Wigman, Graham, and Humphrey each developed an individualized aesthetic based on a specific theory and technique of body movement.

New approaches leading to postmodern dance aesthetics emerged during the 1960s to 1970s and called for fresh approaches to dance aesthetics. The available sources include the writings of and interviews with such American choreographers as Merce Cunningham, Meredith Monk, Yvonne Rainer, Judith and Robert Dunn, and Pooh Kay. In general, however, philosophical discussion of dance has not caught up with existing practice.

In the 1980s and 1990s Western theater dance continues to evolve through the creative efforts of choreographers such as John Neumeier, William Forsythe, Pina Bausch, Mark Morris, Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker, Jan Fabre, and others. Their choreography invites additional contributions to dance aesthetics.

[*See also the entries on the principal figures mentioned herein.*]

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AFGHANISTAN. A very conservative Islamic country, Afghanistan lies on the eastern edge of the Middle East, to the west of Pakistan and India. Afghanistan is at the confluence of Iranian, Central Asian, and Indian cultural currents, and most groups within Afghanistan have ethnic ties across the borders. Indian elements are the least felt, but the rhythmic footwork of some solo dancing is highly reminiscent of classical Indian traditions. A variety of ethnic and linguistic groups, each with its own choreographic tradition, reflects Afghanistan's enormous cultural diversity. Its dance traditions, however, are scarcely documented. As in most Islamic countries, dancers are paid performers who are often regarded askance. According to Mark Slobin (1980) "both male and female dancing is often associated with potential or actual moral laxity. Dancing boys have long been a feature of Afghan entertainment."

Because of Islamic mores, dancing, like most socializing, is sexually segregated, except in a few urban situations. It is currently being banned by the Mujahidin (the